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ABSTRACT

This summary report presents the main findings of the fourth Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) survey of English (involving a random sample of approximately 6,000 pupils in Scotland) and highlights teaching issues. After an introduction that discusses the survey, sampling methods, assessment framework and materials, and performance levels, the report presents results on listening, talking, reading, and writing achievement of pupils at the P4, P7, and S2 educational levels as well as teaching issues (in the form of questions relating to the way reading, writing, listening, and talking are taught). The report then presents survey results based on information from schools regarding resources, learning support, primary/secondary liaison, assessment approaches, organization of teaching, priority aspects of teaching reading and writing, homework, and computers. The report concludes with performance comparisons: overall performance, performance over time, performance between stages, links with "5-14 attainment targets," and gender performance. (Contains two tables of data.) (RS)

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1995

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CS 215 916

Assessment of Achievement Programme

AAP English *1995*

A summary report of the fourth survey

THE SCOTTISH OFFICE
Education and Industry Department

This summary report presents the main findings of the fourth AAP survey of English and highlights teaching issues.

The full report of the survey (including technical and statistical details) is available from the Centre for Research on Learning and Instruction, ISES, The University of Edinburgh, 10/12 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh EH8 9JT.

Information about AAP surveys is also contained in the following publications:

Feedback — a resource for teachers with information about pupils' performance at P4, P7 and S2 and examples of assessment tasks.

Noticeboard — the AAP newsletter which presents information about work in progress, results from the latest surveys and general news about the programme.

For further details of these publications, contact the RIU Dissemination Officer, SCRE, 15 St John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR. Fax: 0131 556 9454.

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1 Introduction

The Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) was established by The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID) in 1981 to monitor the performance of pupils in Scottish schools in particular areas of the curriculum. Since 1983, there have been regular surveys in three core curricular areas – English language, mathematics and science. The main objectives of the AAP are to describe national levels of attainment and to provide evidence about changes in these levels over time. The surveys are intended to inform the SOEID, education authorities, teachers and other interested parties about the achievement of pupils and to indicate ways of improving teaching and learning.

The 1995 AAP English survey

The survey was directed by Angela Napuk with Barbara Normand, Sandra Orr and Anne Deane from the Centre for Research on Learning and Instruction, University of Edinburgh. This team also ran the third survey of English language in 1992.

The responsibility for drawing samples of schools and pupils lies with the AAP Central Support Unit (CSU) at the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE), Edinburgh. They advise on technical matters and liaise with participating schools, distribute materials and carry out the statistical analysis of the survey data.

The AAP English survey took place in May/June 1995. The main objectives were:

- to assess current performance of English language at P4, P7 and S2;
- to relate performance, where possible, to levels of National Guidelines: English 5-14;
- to compare performance in 1995 with that in 1992;
- to compare performance between stages;
- to compare performance of girls and boys at each stage.

Sampling

Samples of pupils at P4, P7 and S2 were selected to be representative of pupils in all mainstream schools, whether education authority, grant-aided or independent. A random sample of approximately 6,000 pupils took part with an equal number of girls and boys being assessed for each language outcome.

Assessment framework

The assessment was based on those strands from the 5-14 National Guidelines which could be accommodated within the framework of a large scale survey. It was necessary to identify the main purposes for which language is used and to assess the achievement of those purposes within contexts which were similar to typical classroom work and to everyday language use. Thematically linked packages were used which required pupils to employ communication skills of listening, talking, reading and writing as an integral part of work on the topic provided. Packages were divided into two parts: one assessed listening and talking and was administered by external assessors; the other part assessed reading and writing and was administered by teachers in the sample schools. Most pupils completed an assessment of one receptive skill and one productive skill, that is, either listening and talking or reading and writing. A small subset completed all four language outcomes. The *Sea* package from the 1992 survey was used to enable comparison to be made of performance over time and a new package, *Changes*, was devised to extend the coverage of strands and give depth to the assessment.

Assessment materials

All assessment tasks were designed to cover the full range of ability at each stage. Particular care was taken to provide a framework that was accessible, interesting, relevant and at the same time challenging. Results are reported in an overall summary of English language skills across the four language outcomes with reference to the 5-14 Guidelines. It should be noted that the formal testing context in which AAP assessments are carried out is less likely to produce a good performance than would well-managed classwork.

Listening and reading

A specially developed video and an audio tape were used as stimuli for the two listening tasks. For reading, both narrative and information texts suitable to the two themes and appropriate for each stage were identified. Each pupil read two texts. For both listening and reading, the assessment tasks used a variety of item types including summary completion, multiple choice, sequencing, true/false/can't tell, fact/opinion and open-ended questions. To produce summary tasks, part or all of the text must be written to reflect the purpose for which the text is being read or heard. Some of the principal meaning-bearing words are then deleted and the pupils are required to replace them. The gaps must be filled with any word or phrase which recreates the meaning of the original text. Plausible answers that make a different sense of the original are not acceptable. The intention is that only someone who has read or heard the original text carefully will be able to fill the gaps accurately.

Talking

The talking assessments followed the listening task and covered both individual/paired talk and group discussion. The pupils began with a group discussion, giving them the opportunity to exchange ideas and develop lines of thought. After this, two pupils spoke in the first instance to each other, observed by the assessor; then the assessor joined in and this small group explored ideas relating to the topic. This assessment was named individual/paired talk as the skills involved both giving information to the listener and interacting with another pupil, prompted by the assessor. Talking skills for the individual/paired talk were identified and grouped into three categories – communication skills, content, and structure – and assessed using descriptors of performance on a three point scale. Comment on group performance was made only in the *Changes* package using a four point scale with performance descriptors.

Writing

There were three types of writing task, functional (letter or report), personal (letter or personal reflection) and imaginative (story), and each writing task was preceded by the two reading tasks. Tasks from the *Changes* package were assessed using the FFAU 5-14 writing criteria; those from the repeated package, the *Sea*, were assessed with the task specific criteria used in the 1992 assessment.

Performance

In the 5-14 programme, the following broad criteria indicate the approximate stage of schooling at which pupils can be expected to attain the various levels of performance.

Level A – should be attainable in the course of P1-P3 by almost all pupils.

Level B – should be attainable by some pupils in P3 or even earlier, but certainly by most in P4.

Level C – should be attainable in the course of P4 - P6 by most pupils.

Level D – should be attainable by some pupils in P5-P6 or even earlier, but certainly by most in P7.

Level E – should be attainable by some pupils in P7/S1, but certainly by most in S2.

2 Listening

Purposes

To obtain information.

To gain an understanding of the ideas and opinions of others.

To interact with others.

To appreciate the feelings of others.

To appreciate the experiences of others.

Strands

Listening for information, instructions and directions.

Listening in groups.

P4 Listening

Pupils at this stage appeared to have a positive attitude towards both the listening tasks and to what was required of them.

The majority of pupils performed reasonably well, particularly on tasks involving the audio tape. They could reconstruct in a meaningful way straightforward information that they had heard, or heard and seen, and could recall with understanding a number of main ideas and some details of information even when they had to generate an answer themselves. From the video they were generally able to recall easily information that was visually reinforced, but found recollecting commentary only or abstract concepts more difficult. In respect of the listening tasks given in the survey, the majority of the pupils were able to attain the targets set out in Level B strand *Listening for information, instructions and directions* in the 5-14 Guidelines.

Performance on the audio tape was better than on the video; the mean scores were 23 out of 31 and 11 out of 23 respectively. This may in part be due to the difference in style and pace of the information given. The audio tape had the measured speech of an old lady gently reminiscing, whilst the commentary on the video had a faster delivery as well as some supplementary ideas given non-visually. Less able listeners may have found some of the vocabulary in the video text unfamiliar even though it was reinforced visually. On both tasks, a few listeners had difficulties where they had both to recall and understand the text and to produce appropriate vocabulary themselves to answer the questions.

At this stage there were a few pupils whose co-ordination was not sufficiently developed to enable them to write answers easily; and a few whose lack of reading skills made it difficult for them to provide an appropriate answer. Although the pupils had been told that they could have help with reading the questions, a few pupils appeared to be reluctant to admit their reading difficulties. Evidence suggests that where pupils found one

or more of the processes – concentrated listening and watching, reading, recalling, interpreting or writing – beyond their current ability, they were unable to produce many correct answers.

More able listeners could remember and generate a suitable reconstruction of both the main ideas and some details throughout the tasks. These pupils were demonstrating an ability to select relevant auditory and visual information appropriate to the task, suggesting a Level C performance in the strand *Listening for information, instructions and directions.*

P7 Listening

The majority of pupils could recall the main ideas and some supporting and specific details in the listening assessments. Most pupils had a general understanding of the material and could recall information as appropriate. The overall performance appeared to be slightly better on the audio task; on one more difficult task some pupils were distracted by the visual imagery of the video and failed to listen carefully to the commentary.

The majority of pupils appeared to be attaining the target defined at Level D in the strand *Listening for information, instructions and directions*, showing they could recall main ideas and the gist of the information, and could use these facts to complete the assessment. However, a number of pupils could only recall information inaccurately and made inappropriate choices of answer. A few pupils gave an answer related to the topic but not applicable within the specific context, showing a superficial assimilation of information and an inaccurate application of what they had heard.

Less able listeners (about 30%) were having difficulties with abstract concepts, recalling characteristics, summarising and making inferences. It would appear that these pupils were not listening carefully enough to pick up important details, perhaps because of an inability to visualise and/or apply what they were hearing. They may also have been treating each item in the summary completion as a discrete gap, rather than understanding that the task was a summary of the whole commentary. Some of these pupils have not yet learned to listen carefully enough to the spoken word, so were often unable to recall general concepts and details, even though the assessment took place immediately after listening to the stimulus material.

S2 Listening

At this stage, the majority of pupils were able to recall the main and supporting ideas and some specific details in both the listening assessments. They had a general understanding of the texts involved and could recall information when required. In the audio task, most pupils could remember specific details when these relied on literal recall. In the video assessment, the majority were able to give answers that relied on the commentary only and which were not reinforced visually.

However, where the questions related to more abstract concepts, just under half the pupils had difficulties. Although these questions did not lend themselves to visual reinforcement and had been repeated in the commentary, they required more interpretation and deduction. These pupils appeared to be reluctant or unable to generate their own answers, and instead used an inappropriate word from the commentary. Listening involves processing what is heard by drawing upon prior knowledge and experience. However, in some instances pupils relied on their own assumptions or reactions rather than listening precisely to what was required by the text.

In respect of these listening tasks, the majority of pupils demonstrated clearly an understanding of the purpose of the tasks and were able to listen so as to pinpoint specific information. The majority of pupils could recall details and make accurate choices. This suggests that they were working at Level E for the strand *Listening for information, instructions and directions.*

Teaching issues

- Are pupils taught to value good listening skills?

- Are good listening skills being encouraged through a variety of resources across the curriculum?
- Are pupils encouraged to develop/improve their listening strategies?
- Are pupils carefully prepared for listening tasks (background, context, vocabulary)? Are they made aware of the purposes for listening/watching? Do they know in advance how information is to be used?
- Are pupils encouraged to visualise and discuss what they hear?
- Are pupils encouraged to listen/watch closely for specific information?
- Do some listening tasks need a concrete dimension (picture, outline) to help focus concentration?
- Do pupils practise putting ideas they have heard/seen into their own words?
- Are pupils aware that careful listening/watching may be crucial to the successful completion of a task?
- Are pupils encouraged to listen for abstract as well as concrete concepts?
- At what stage should pupils take responsibility for checking that their answers match the questions?

3 Talking

Purposes

To convey information.

To present ideas and opinions and to share these with others.

To interact with others.

To express feelings.

To defend ideas and opinions when and where appropriate.

To present and share experiences with others.

Strands

Conveying information, instructions and directions.

Talking in groups.

Talking about experiences, feelings and opinions.

Audience awareness.

P4 Talking

Pupils were willing and able to work together in the group discussion in the *Changes* topic, with every group in the survey managing to complete the task and many groups demonstrating competent listening skills as well as an ability to keep the discussion moving along. Pupils seemed more willing to offer new ideas when working in groups than when talking to the assessor. At this stage, as might be expected, many groups found it difficult to fulfil the criteria for 'Following the discussion' and to give their reasons for 'Reacting to others'.

Pupils' ability to communicate in the individual/paired talk assessment appeared to be context-dependent; percentages of competent performance for each of the sub-skills was slightly higher in the *Changes* topic. For a number of pupils it was easier to talk about possible changes to their immediate surroundings, their classroom and their school, than to plan a mural. When talking with another child and the assessor, the pupils showed more aptitude across the 'communication skills' than in the 'content' or 'structure' categories of the assessment criteria. Although pupils were willing to participate in the talking tasks and often had ideas, approximately a quarter had not acquired the skills of considering the needs of the listener or thinking ahead to organise what they were saying.

In individual/paired talking, over a third of the pupils could convey straightforward relevant ideas and support a point of view when necessary and just under half the sample found it easy to talk about their own personal experiences or feelings. Although a few pupils were daunted by having a conversation with a stranger, with the result that they became quite reticent or inaudible, approximately two-fifths spoke fluently and adopted an appropriate tone and register.

The talking tasks in the survey incorporated four strands from the 5-14 Guidelines: *Conveying information, instructions and directions; Talking in groups; Talking about experiences, feelings and opinions; Audience awareness*. The majority of pupils appeared to have achieved competence in the act of talking, ie 'communication skills', whether in a group (group discussion), a small group or in a one-to-one activity (individual/paired talk), and appeared to be able to achieve a Level B in so far as the attainment targets define criteria to assess talk. However, the survey criteria are more specific and the results from these suggest that in the extra categories looking at the particular areas of content and structure, many pupils found it difficult to produce a competent standard.

P7 Talking

Group work activities are used in many primary classrooms to good effect and this was reflected in the performance of P7 pupils in the group assessment task. Most groups had new ideas, competent listening skills, could keep the discussion on target and were able to complete the task in a satisfactory manner. Some pupils in groups had difficulty offering explanations for their reactions to each other's ideas but on the whole group activity was done well.

Performance for individual/paired talk at this stage was slightly topic-dependent with a higher percentage of pupils achieving a good standard for all the sub-skills in *Changes*. The majority of pupils applied themselves to the task and were willing to engage in a dialogue with an appropriate tone. About half of all pupils were able to convey relevant and varied ideas, and the majority were able to talk easily about their feelings and experiences. Not surprisingly perhaps, the scores for both conveying relevant information and supporting a point of view were considerably higher when pupils were sharing and discussing their thoughts on possible changes to their environment than when they were talking about painting a mural.

The least satisfactory performance was in the 'structure' category but even here just under half the sample were considered competent at sequencing and organising their ideas logically. They showed a readiness to take into account the needs of the listener but they had some difficulty building on others' contributions, particularly for the *Sea* task. Pupils at this stage appeared to have developed sufficient confidence in communication skills to feel they had something to say and to be interesting. The majority were able to contribute constructively to a conversation. Overall, pupils seemed to be relatively competent in talk, able to contribute effectively to both the given topics.

The talking tasks in the survey incorporated four strands from the 5-14 Guidelines: *Conveying information, instructions and directions; Talking in groups; Talking about experiences, feelings and opinions; Audience awareness*. The majority of pupils appear to have achieved a competence in the *act* of talking, ie 'communication skills', whether in a group (group discussion) or in a one-to-one activity (individual/paired talk), and were achieving Level D. Although the survey did not include giving a prepared oral presentation, as detailed in Level D for the strand *Talking about experiences, feelings and opinions*, in terms of the survey criteria, over half the pupils could talk readily about their feelings and experiences and appeared to be competent at this level. The programmes of study for this strand suggest that pupils should be made aware of the ideas of introduction, conclusion and summary when thinking about the structure of their talk. Results from the survey show that, though just under half the pupils demonstrated competence in these aspects of talking skills, there are still a few who were not able to structure their talk satisfactorily and attained a lower level.

S2 Talking

Group dynamics appear to have a significant effect on the performance of individuals at this stage. For many pupils the group discussion in the *Changes* topic involved sharing ideas with pupils from other classes or members of the peer group outside their personal circle, even though the subject matter could affect everyone. In some groups, assertive talkers were allowed to dominate and those unwilling, too reticent or unable to contribute made little effort to redress the balance.

Realistic pupils were well aware that their ideas would not be taken further and some felt that the discussion was time wasting. (In one pilot trial it was suggested that pupils might be empowered to take their ideas forward. The teacher was willing to pursue this and, after additional classroom work, a formal presentation by the pupils was made to the head with positive results – changes were implemented.) Group members had problems listening to each other and giving reasons to defend ideas that were challenged. Only 40% of the groups reached a satisfactory conclusion and completed the task as a group activity.

On the individual/paired talking assessment tasks, slightly more pupils showed a willingness to participate in the *Changes* topic than in *The Sea*. However, overall the pattern of performance across the 'communication skills' appears not to have been topic-dependent and approximately half the pupils spoke clearly and attentively, using a tone and register that were appropriate to the purpose and audience. In both tasks, interactive skills were not strong, with only 31% achieving a competent performance for the *Sea* task and 41% for *Changes*.

Pupils seemed to be somewhat more confident when conveying items of information or instruction than when expressing ideas, but the quality of the content of talk was generally not very high. Only about 40% of pupils demonstrated skill in talking about personal experiences and feelings, which may reflect young teenagers' reluctance to adopt what may seem to them a vulnerable position. The concept of organising and structuring talk is sophisticated, and though over one third of pupils showed some skill in this area, there appeared to be a lack of awareness of the necessity to think about what is said, and to organise and structure the content of their talk. About a third of pupils were unable or unwilling to make use of others' ideas and found difficulty in providing explanations to help the listener to understand the discussion.

In respect of those talking tasks incorporating the four strands, *Conveying information, instructions and directions*, *Talking in groups*, *Talking about experiences, feelings and opinions*, and *Audience awareness*, the majority of pupils were able to convey information, though with a limited awareness of the listener's needs. In the individual/paired talking activity, approximately four-fifths of pupils showed some competence in the 'communication skills' category of the survey criteria for talk and appeared to be achieving Level E as far as the 5-14 strands detail criteria for assessing these skills. However, about one third of the pupils had difficulty in skills defined in the 'content' and 'structure' categories of the survey criteria, particularly in the skills of building on others' contributions and ideas, and talking about personal experiences, feelings or interests. These skills, outlined in the programmes of study at Level E, though not in the attainment targets, were not yet being achieved by these pupils. Approximately a third of the groups (group discussion) appeared to have difficulty attaining the targets for Level E and seemed unable or unwilling to use the skills required to complete the task successfully.

Teaching issues

- Are pupils aware of the effectiveness/power/value of good talking skills?
- Do pupils have opportunities to hear good examples of a range of spoken language?
- Are pupils' personal experiences used constructively/sensitively to develop their talking skills?
- Are talking skills developed through team/group work across all aspects of the curriculum?
- Are pupils given worthwhile, unthreatening opportunities and relevant, thought-provoking topics for discussion designed to promote enthusiasm for developing competent talking skills?
- Are pupils aware of interactive skills and good standards of talking in groups?
- Are pupils made aware that careful listening is an important component of good oral communication skills?

- Are pupils encouraged to organise and structure their talk? Are they aware of the need for ideas to be sequenced logically and show progression?
- Are pupils encouraged to build on each other's ideas to advance and develop discussion?
- Are pupils aware that all members of a group should be encouraged to contribute? Are they encouraged to make positive responses to each other's contributions so that confidence in communicative situations is built up?
- Are pupils developing an awareness of others in talking situations? Are they encouraged to consider the needs of the listener?
- Are pupils given opportunities to develop their own talking criteria to use in the evaluation of their peer group?
- Do pupils have opportunities to use debate to foster talking/listening skills?

4 Reading

Purposes

To obtain information.

To gain an understanding of the ideas, experiences and opinions presented in texts.

To appreciate the feelings of others.

Strands

Reading to reflect on the writer's ideas and craft.

Awareness of genre.

P4 Reading

Most pupils at this stage could understand the main ideas presented and feelings conveyed in both informative and narrative texts. Even the pupils whose reading skills were fairly limited could identify some main ideas. The majority could also understand some supporting ideas and the more able readers could locate and identify details in both narrative and information texts. Although pupils appeared to be able to recognise statements referring to the beginning and conclusion of the story, they found it difficult to sequence the ideas in the middle of a story. Performance was satisfactory on items that required pupils to decide who might have said this or that. In respect of these tasks, most pupils were working well at Level B in the assessed strand *Reading to reflect on the writer's ideas and craft.*

Most pupils appeared to be prepared to work at answers throughout both narrative and information tasks and, where the content and language were accessible, were undeterred by the length of a text. There were, however, a number of pupils who simply could not read with understanding and were still having difficulty with individual words. These pupils had not developed sufficient fluency, skill or confidence to understand the whole text or to see the relationships between the words themselves, with the result that the demands of the task were beyond their reach. Some pupils who were unable to see certain connections within the text, or who may not have read the text carefully enough, often recognised a particular characteristic but attributed it to the wrong person or situation.

The evidence suggests that often pupils do not re-read the text when looking for information or may not check that what they have written as an answer is consistent with the task. Perhaps these pupils include those who found reading the story once as much as they could manage and so had to rely on memory for their answers. Many are also still at the stage where their level of confidence and ability does not encourage re-reading and checking.

At P4, however, there were pupils who were competent and confident readers who could work at finding information in specific parts of the text, have the skill to use inference, to make the

connections between the task and text, and to generate answers for themselves. These pupils demonstrated a competence appropriate to a Level C when reflecting on the writer's ideas and craft.

P7 Reading

The majority of pupils were able to cope with the mechanical aspects of reading and to grasp the surface meaning of the text. In respect of both narrative and informative texts, more than half the pupils were able to show an understanding of the gist of the text and the main ideas and feelings. These pupils were working towards Level D in the strands *Reading to reflect on the writer's ideas and craft* and *Awareness of genre*. They were able to show that they had understood the simpler aspects of the writer's craft and use of language, could understand the differences between fact and opinion and had an awareness of genre.

However, approximately a quarter of the pupils assessed on the informative texts and two-fifths of the sample assessed on the narrative texts, failed to achieve some of the attainment targets outlined at this level. They had difficulty with inference, could not grasp the import of feelings, and failed to show an understanding of some aspects of the writer's craft, for example, choice of vocabulary, writing style and traits of the characters. In spite of the efforts of teachers to set the context and purpose for the reading tasks clearly and carefully, a number of pupils seemed to have failed to keep these in mind and some answers demonstrated little more than a superficial understanding of texts. Less competent readers were unable to make the essential connection between the text and the task, and gave answers that were either unconsidered or inaccurate. They seemed to be relying on a first reading of the text, expecting answers to be instant and obvious, showing some reluctance to work at an answer.

About a third of pupils at this stage had difficulties appreciating the relationship between characters and between characters and their situations. Although more confident readers could make accurate predictions, many pupils gave answers that showed little evidence of careful close reading. A small proportion of skilled readers were able to consider the underlying essence and subtleties of both narrative and informative texts, and showed an ability to locate specific details, make inferences and formulate answers consistent with the text. These few demonstrated a proficiency beyond Level D.

S2 Reading

The majority of pupils were able to understand the main ideas and most of the details in both narrative and informative texts. Most pupils at this stage were able to locate information confidently and could generate answers consistent with the text. There is evidence of some pupils being accustomed to having to think carefully about the answer-finding process and to understanding subtleties of the text.

In respect of the information texts used in the survey, the majority of pupils were working towards or at Level E for the strand *Reading to reflect on the writer's ideas and craft*. They could skim and scan the text to locate the information required and were able to deal with a variety of styles. The more able few could locate and identify main ideas and purposes, relate details to the overall context and translate or transfer specific information as appropriate, thus showing an understanding of these texts beyond Level E.

Within narrative texts, competent readers were able to empathise with characters and showed a genuine involvement with the story line. These readers were able to understand and summarise ideas, identify figures of speech and generate answers not stated in the text. A small number of pupils were able to identify individual features of the author's technique and the effects of these features, make inferences, and show an understanding of the inter-relationships between the main concerns of the text. These few pupils appeared to be attaining beyond Level E.

However, although the majority of pupils showed a growing confidence in reading skills, there were still some who were having difficulty with various aspects of reading ability expected at this stage. These pupils appeared to be reading superficially and failing to understand the connections between task and text. Approximately one-third of the pupils seemed to have difficulties where the tasks

involved examining the writer's style and could not interpret or understand the writer's use of figurative language. Similarly, about a third of the pupils were unable to look for and understand the way an author uses language to colour a text or story and had not yet developed an appreciation of the writer's craft and the nuances of language. Items that required an ability to summarise ideas and concepts and those relating to genre were often beyond the reach of less able readers (approximately 20-30% of pupils). These pupils were not as yet able to achieve all the attainment targets for Level E as identified in the strands, *Awareness of genre* and *Knowledge about language*.

The majority of pupils demonstrated a fairly reasonable competence in reading skills, but in items requiring an understanding of imagery, inference and/or textual structure, as detailed in the Level E programmes of study, approximately a third were having difficulties.

Teaching issues

- Is careful reading encouraged through a variety of activities across the curriculum? Are pupils exposed to a wide variety of types of reading material?
- Do younger pupils practise sequencing important elements of a story they have read?
- Do pupils practise putting ideas they have read into their own words?
- Are pupils developing an appreciation of the ways different writers use language? Do they recognise the relationship between language and genre?
- Are pupils encouraged to consider contextual cues and make inferences from what they have read?
- Are pupils encouraged to consider the opinion/point of view of the writer?
- Are pupils encouraged to skim and scan to find information?
- Are pupils made aware of the ways the writer uses punctuation and paragraphing?
- At what stage do pupils take responsibility for checking that their answers are appropriate to the questions and to the text they have read?
- Are pupils encouraged to examine narrative texts for the emotional reactions of characters to situations? Do they discuss characterisation and relationships between characters?
- Are pupils aware of the techniques used by the writer to create setting and atmosphere?
- Are pupils encouraged to examine the structure of a story and the way the writer develops a plot?
- Do pupils recognise the relationship between their reading and strategies they might use in writing?

5 Writing

Purposes

To convey information.

To express feelings.

To plan, express and explain ideas and opinions.

To record and relate experiences.

Strands

Functional writing.

Personal writing.

Imaginative writing.

Punctuation and structure.

Spelling.

P4 Writing

Performance on all the writing tasks shows that Level B in writing is within the reach of the majority of P4 pupils for the assessed strands *Functional writing*, *Personal writing*, *Imaginative writing*, *Punctuation and structure* and *Spelling*.

The planning page, which was given to provide a basic structure for all writing tasks, received a varied response at P4. Those pupils who had either used a planning page on previous occasions or were guided by the teacher during the introduction of the writing task and understood what was intended, used the planning page to good effect to organise and shape their writing. Others, however, seemed to be unfamiliar with the concept and neglected to make use of the teacher's explanation. They failed to make the connection between planning page and writing, as if the two were quite separate exercises. Either many good ideas on the planning page did not appear in the writing itself, or the two sheets seemed to be totally unrelated.

Approximately 70% of pupils were able to produce satisfactory examples of writing on the two functional tasks, a report and a letter. Spelling was particularly good for the 'School Report', probably because pupils were familiar with the vocabulary needed to express their views. A few pupils had difficulty expressing their ideas and simply wrote one statement in response to each of the planning page guidelines, making little attempt to link their ideas.

There were two personal writing tasks, a letter and a description of thoughts and feelings about the sea. Those pupils who were familiar with the formal conventions of letter writing, address, date, salutation, were demonstrating a comfortable application of the techniques. A few pupils found the less formal structure required for 'The Sea and Me', expressing feelings and opinions about the sea, difficult to cope with. The task may have been too sophisticated for those less confident writers who were unable to organise ideas or to record experiences in an appropriate sequence with adequate vocabulary.

Most pupils at this stage were familiar with the imaginative story-writing genre and appeared to

enjoy the task, with over 50% performing at Level B or above. Those pupils who were unable to reach the national target produced stories which tended to be rather flat, had little coherent shape, showed no personal reaction to the changed situation and lacked imagination and colour. They did not display any discernible organisation and were able to produce only a limited range of language. However, the range of ability at this stage is shown by the 12% of pupils whose writing was attaining Level C and in a few cases Level D.

The mechanical aspects of writing were still at an early stage of development for approximately a third of pupils. Across all tasks there were some problems with punctuation and on one task, imaginative writing, nearly 50% of pupils were performing below the national target. Pupils need to be made aware at an early stage of the need to use punctuation to support meaning in their writing and to differentiate between upper and lower case letters. Across the tasks, approximately 30% of pupils had difficulties with spelling, especially in the imaginative writing task. The attainment targets as defined in Level B advocate the use of a simple wordbank or dictionary. Such resources were not made available in the assessment, and this should be taken into account when considering this aspect of writing.

P7 Writing

Although much of the writing at this stage is not reaching the national target Level D, many pupils are working well at Level C for the assessed strands *Functional writing*, *Personal writing*, *Imaginative writing*, *Punctuation and structure* and *Spelling*, though the purpose and use of accurate punctuation needs to be addressed.

Most pupils at this stage were willing to share their ideas, were usually able to convey a basic message in their writing and appeared to be aware of the purpose of their writing, although they were not always able to achieve this. Across all writing tasks, nearly three quarters of the pupils seemed to have difficulty in using a range of language, in organising their ideas in a logical sequence and in structuring their writing to satisfy the reader's needs.

Of the functional writing tasks, pupils found it easier to write the letter, 'The Eyemouth Enquiry', than the report, 'Let's Improve', where, although there were many excellent and obviously passionately held ideas, many scripts lacked coherent organisation and paragraphing. It was difficult for about half the writers to choose and/or sustain an appropriate tone and more than half the pupils seemed unaware altogether of the structure required for a written report. Although the letter format provided a familiar framework for 'The Eyemouth Enquiry', approximately one third of the letters lacked the range of information needed to satisfy the reader, often included irrelevancies and were inadequately structured.

Most pupils understood that the personal writing task, a letter to Chris, should be welcoming and reassuring but some were unable to sustain the requisite tone and many letters did not provide appropriate information. A few pupils wrote thoughtful letters, showing a sensitivity and empathy for Chris, often illustrating their comments with anecdotes of personal experience.

On the two imaginative writing tasks, 'Alone in a Storm' and 'Through the Door', although there were some well-structured interesting stories with appropriate vocabulary, many were mundane, lacked coherent narrative structure, had a weak story line, and were laden with irrelevant detail or dialogue. Approximately 40% of the sample were able to achieve the national target Level D for their writing 'Through the Door' but less than 30% were deemed competent or good in 'Alone in a Storm' (assessed against the 1992 task-specific criteria). Much of the writing, particularly in 'Alone in a Storm', was written in a flat, dull style with little attempt to organise ideas, and would have required extensive redrafting to attain a Level D. The link between a wide reading experience and writing was to be found in those few stories where the language and detail created a convincing impression of the scene, the story had an overall shape and coherence, the characters and events were developed, the sentence structure was effectively varied and even the first draft was a 'good read'.

Many pupils at this stage are still having problems with mechanical skills, particularly with punctuation. The arbitrary use of capital letters

and full stops together with the scattering of speech marks and apostrophes detract somewhat from the reader's involvement. Many scripts lacked any evidence of paragraphing and poor spelling often hindered comprehension. Much of the writing showed an absence of linking of idea to idea or paragraph to paragraph. This was particularly evident for the report, 'Let's Improve', where 60% of pupils could not achieve higher than a Level B.

S2 Writing

Most pupils at S2 appeared to understand the purposes for writing and often had plenty of ideas, yet only a small proportion were able to translate these into a piece of effective writing for the assessed strands *Functional writing*, *Personal writing*, *Imaginative writing*, *Punctuation and structure* and *Spelling*.

There were two functional writing tasks. In the *Sea* newspaper report, two thirds of pupils failed to adopt a tone appropriate to this genre and appeared to be unfamiliar with even rudimentary layout, though approximately one third were able to write a fairly competent report using material from various sources. While the majority seemed unable to draw on materials from more than one source and were unable to write a report (skills outlined in the programmes of study), some 5% could present and order their ideas and opinions, give reasons for their point of view, and choose a literary form to achieve a particular effect, thus showing an ability in writing beyond a Level E. Up to half of the scripts for the *Changes*, 'Let's Improve' report, though full of ideas and personal preferences, were confused, showing little regard for the need of an appropriate style or register. Overall, in respect of these two functional writing tasks, about a quarter of the pupils were able to use appropriate language and style, and could organise their ideas constructively, thus achieving the attainment target as defined in Level E.

Both personal writing tasks were letters. The pupils performed most successfully in this type of writing where the format was tightly structured and familiar, but where the content allowed for a range of personal expression to an audience with whom they could identify. The letters to Angus and Chris showed some evidence of careful reflection and justification of advice and were generally more competently written. However, even here only one quarter of the pupils were attaining the national target.

Imaginative writing continues, even at this stage, to cause problems. There were a few confidently written stories that included all the elements of a good read, where the writer's enthusiasm for and enjoyment of the task were evident. However, many stories had unsatisfactory endings, illogical sequencing, tedious dialogue, or a style which lacked colour and texture. A few pupils showed an understanding of suitable turning points and resolutions in the structure of their stories and could show convincingly the effects of the situation on the characters. These few pupils, less than 10%, appeared to be achieving the attainment targets at Level E in respect of the imaginative writing task.

Across all tasks, over half the pupils demonstrated inadequate mechanical skills; their scripts showed weak sentence structure, infrequent use of link words, absence of paragraphing, and spelling and punctuation poor enough to be obtrusive. This pattern was most evident where there was least structure imposed upon the writing, ie in imaginative writing, where the pupils had to provide the structure for themselves. Handwriting was not assessed in this survey, but there were a significant number of pupils whose handwriting hampered the reader's comprehension. Capital letters, or letters that appeared to be capitals, were often used indiscriminately. Some of these problems might, of course, be eradicated in the normal course of re-drafting, but, on the evidence of the survey, the majority of pupils were far from attaining Level E in strands *Punctuation and structure* and *Spelling*.

Teaching issues

- Are pupils exposed to a wide variety of writing models?

- Are pupils given opportunities to develop different writing strategies for tasks across the curriculum?
- Are pupils aware of the audience and purpose for writing before they begin to write? Are they encouraged to keep the audience and purpose in mind and to consider the needs of the reader as they write?
- Are pupils shown that careful planning can help give their writing shape and structure? Can group discussion be used for sharing ideas and planning writing?
- Are pupils encouraged to experiment with a variety of language?
- Are pupils aware of appropriate tone and register as used in different kinds of writing?
- Are pupils taught the essential elements and techniques of letter writing?
- Are pupils encouraged to give personal written responses in a variety of tasks across the curriculum?
- Are pupils aware that punctuation should support meaning in their writing? Reading their own stories aloud can help them to see where punctuation is needed. Are they encouraged to avoid carelessness in spelling? Have they been taught to think about the appropriate use of upper and lower case letters, apostrophes and inverted commas?
- Are pupils aware of the importance of paragraphing in organising and structuring writing?
- At what stage should pupils be encouraged to see the connection between their writing and features of the writer's craft they encounter in their reading?
- Are pupils encouraged to take pride in and responsibility for their writing and to read over written work before handing it in to the intended reader?
- Are pupils aware that an important feature of imaginative writing is the need to sustain the reader's interest?

6 Information from schools

In the 1995 AAP English Language survey two questionnaires were used – one circulated to each participating school and the other to every pupil taking part.

Resources

The core published reading scheme was the most popular scheme used by the majority of schools at primary level, particularly P4. This was also the case in 1992. Use of teacher-generated materials has increased from 'occasionally' to 'frequently' across all three stages. As in 1992, children's dictionaries and reference books were the most frequently used resources at P7, while children's fiction books were most frequently used at S2. Secondary schools rarely used writing schemes and they were only occasionally used at P4. The most frequently used listening/talking resource at all three stages was teacher/pupil discussions. Specially prepared topics for group discussion and texts read by the teacher are used more frequently at S2 than at the other two stages. At all stages the highest percentages of response occurred in the 'sometimes' category for the use of radio broadcasts, TV programmes and drama. Debating was sometimes used at P7 and S2 but seldom or never at P4.

Learning support

The majority of schools at all stages indicated that learning support had been provided for pupils in the week before the survey. This support was given by specialist learning support teachers in 63% of schools at P4; 60% at P7 and 81% at S2.

Primary/secondary liaison

Practically all schools had primary-secondary liaison arrangements. This usually took the form of a piece of 'bridging' work, ie a piece of work started in P7 and finished in S1. Liaison visits involving either pupils and/or a secondary school English teacher were also frequently reported.

Assessment approaches

Almost 100% of schools at all stages used scrutiny of classwork as a way of assessing pupils. Most schools also used unstructured observation, scrutiny of homework and compilation of folders of work in their assessment of pupils' work. Nearly three-quarters of schools at the primary level used commercially produced tests, while at secondary teacher-produced tests were more frequently used.

Organisation of teaching

Whole class teaching was less frequently used at P4 and P7 than at S2 while working in groups was more popular at P4 and P7 than at S2. At the primary level, most schools used individual teaching/pupils working on their own for approximately a quarter of the time spent in teaching English. Less than half the secondary schools used this approach for the same proportion of time.

Priority to aspects of teaching reading and writing

As in 1992, all three stages gave high priority to use of context when teaching reading. There was an increase in the primary stages in teachers giving high priority to reading aloud. At P7 there was a decrease in the use of class or group study of novels. P4 schools give a higher priority to hearing children reading from a scheme than P7 and S2.

Homework

Across all three stages, most pupils were expected to spend one hour per week on English homework.

Computers

The use of computers decreases through the stages from P4 to S2 and the main use at all three stages is for word processing/redrafting. At primary level most schools use computers as an aid/ stimulus to writing and for learning reinforcement.

7 Performance comparisons

Overall performance

- Standards at P4 for all four language outcomes would appear for the most part to be in line with Level B.
- The majority of P7 pupils are competent talkers and attaining Level D. The majority are working at Level D in listening and over half are working towards Level D for reading. Approximately one third of pupils are achieving Level D for writing with a further third attaining Level C.
- At S2, performance in listening and reading shows that the majority of pupils are working towards Level E. For talking, less than half the pupils are achieving a Level E in the individual/paired talking, and approximately a third of the groups were assessed at the national target. For many pupils, attainment in writing is well below the national target, Level E. On tasks marked with the national criteria, one fifth of pupils achieved this target and one third were assessed at Level D.

Performance over time

Table 1 below shows the comparison of performance between 1992 and 1995. (No direct comparisons can be made between performance in 1989 and 1995.) All stages saw some significant decline in reading, but at P4 and P7 writing skills have improved. At P7 there was a significant improvement in two talking skills: 'shows attention to task' and 'willingly participates and talks easily about personal experiences, feelings or interests'.

Performance between stages

Comparison was made between P7 and S2 only. S2 performed significantly better on all listening, reading and writing tasks bar one – imaginative writing. On this one task there was a significant difference in spelling, where P7 performed better than S2, but there was no difference between the stages for language, punctuation and ideas.

Table 1: *1995 performance compared with 1992 performance*

	P4	P7	S2
Listening	No change.	No change.	No change.
Talking	No change.	Improvement in two skills.	No change.
Reading	Decline on one narrative text.	Decline on two texts; one information, one narrative.	Decline on one information text.
Writing	– Improvement in Language on one task. – Improvement in Ideas on both tasks. – Improvement in Mechanics on both tasks.	– Improvement in Language on one task. – Improvement in Ideas on both tasks. – Improvement in Mechanics on both tasks.	Decline in Mechanics on one task.

Links with 5-14 attainment targets

There are discrepancies in performance between attainment and the suggested national targets both at P7 and at S2. It should be borne in mind that the constraints of the survey may have made it difficult for pupils to produce their best work. For example, from the responses received in the school questionnaire concerning approaches to writing, almost all schools at S2 gave high priority to 'preparing rough drafts' and 'redrafting to improve meaning and expression'. Pupils at S2 would appear to use redrafting as part of their usual process when producing a piece of writing; redrafting was not possible within the survey.

The evidence from the survey suggests that Level E, as it is currently interpreted, is not being achieved by many pupils at S2. This was particularly noticeable on those writing tasks where the 5-14 national test writing criteria had been applied. In the light of this survey, problems, for example with the mechanics of writing, need to be addressed as early as possible in the primary school. Performance at S2, which for many pupils was below expected levels of achievement, suggested that recommendations outlined in the 5-14 English language guidelines have still to take effect.

Gender performance

- At P4 girls performed significantly better in the following: one talking skill (body language) and two of the eight reading tasks (one information and one narrative).
- At P7 girls performed significantly better in the following: one talking skill (appropriate tone) and two of the nine reading tasks (both narrative).
- At S2 girls performed significantly better in five of the nine reading tasks (two information and three narrative).

Performance in writing for all three stages is shown in Table 2 below.

***Table 2**: Comparison of performance by gender*

Sea	Language	P4 P7 S2	Girls significantly better in 1 of 2 tasks. Girls significantly better in 2 of 2 tasks. Girls significantly better in 2 of 2 tasks.
	Ideas	P4 P7 S2	Girls significantly better in 1 of 2 tasks. Girls significantly better in 2 of 2 tasks. Girls significantly better in 2 of 2 tasks.
	Mechanics	P4 P7 S2	Girls significantly better in 1 of 2 tasks. Girls significantly better in 1 of 2 tasks. Girls significantly better in 2 of 2 tasks.
Changes	Language	P4 P7 S2	Girls significantly better in 3 of 3 tasks. Girls significantly better in 1 of 3 tasks. Girls significantly better in 3 of 3 tasks.
	Spelling	P7 S2	Girls significantly better in 1 of 3 tasks. Girls significantly better in 3 of 3 tasks.
	Ideas	P4 P7 S2	Girls significantly better in 3 of 3 tasks. Girls significantly better in 2 of 3 tasks. Girls significantly better in 3 of 3 tasks.
	Punctuation	P4 P7 S2	Girls significantly better in 1 of 3 tasks. Girls significantly better in 2 of 3 tasks. Girls significantly better in 3 of 3 tasks.